

Bath and North East Somerset Council &

First Bus

## **Joint Statement**

B&NES Local Plan Partial Update  
Policy SB23 (Weston Island), SB3 (Manvers Street)  
and SB6 (South Bank)  
Local Plan Partial Update Matter 4 - Area Policies  
and allocations

24 May 2022

## **B&NES Local Plan Partial Update**

### **Re: Site Allocation Policy SB23 Weston Island**

This is a Joint Statement between First Bus and Bath and North East Somerset Council in response to the following Inspectors questions from Matter 4: Area Policies and allocations:

#### **Policy SB23 Weston Island**

**Q.23 Is there a realistic prospect that the bus depot will be relocated within the plan period and if not, would Policy SB23 be effective and is it justified?**

**Q.24 What is the evidence that the existing employment uses such as those within sites SB3 and SB6 would be likely to relocate to the site? Would the Plan be effective in facilitating this?**

#### **Weston Island**

Located in the western part of the city, the island was created in the 1720s following the construction of the 'Weston Cut' canal that enabled this section of the river to be navigable. With an area of approx. 2.3 HA, Weston Island has been used throughout its history as open gardens, and for a variety of industrial uses including Mills (woollen, timber, brass), as storage by Stothert and Pitt.

For about the last 25 years, the site has been used as a bus depot for First Bus, providing the operational base for their fleet in Bath and the surrounding district. The site is owned freehold by their parent company, First Group, and a portion of the site is leased to Curo for parking and the Environment Agency, who own the operational flood defence radial gate at the western portion of the island.

#### **First Bus**

First Bus has a number of current and operational challenges with Weston Island and there is a need to instigate the following operational improvements:

- The site location in Bath restricts their ability to recruit and retain operational staff, many of whom in-commute to service and maintain the fleet.
- The facility does not provide the optimum service model for route efficiency.
- The site restrictions limits future technology changes for both electrification and hydrogen conversion to de-carbonise due to the flood risk constraints and location.

First Bus has investigated operating models that relocate this facility to improve service provision, and recruitment and retention of staff to provide a better service model. This could comprise:

- A facility on the edge of Bath for overnight layover, refuel, light maintenance and end of service clean
- A maintenance depot located in the Radstock/Midsomer Norton area for maintenance and fleet storage.

Appropriate sites within these locations are actively being explored and whilst the nature of these discussions is commercially sensitive, positive progress is being made.

## **B&NES**

The relocation of the Bus Depot would not only address the operational requirements of First Bus but would also enable B&NES to facilitate the relocation of existing employment uses to Weston Island. This would enable the redevelopment and regeneration of the Manvers Street site (site SB3) and the South Bank site on the Lower Bristol Road (site SB6). The relocation of these existing uses will therefore unlock the delivery of complex sites which are allocated for higher density mixed use development and would contribute towards achieving strategic planning policy objectives such as the delivery of homes and jobs.

There are ongoing discussions with the existing businesses about their specific operational and relocation requirements, and whilst these are positive and there is a desire to relocate, no firm commitments can be provided at this stage. Importantly, the relocation of First Bus from Weston Island allows for these opportunities to be facilitated.

The Council has a WECA Strategic Outline Business Case funding allocation that links the relocation of First Bus, the strategic relocation of these existing employment uses, and the enabling works required to facilitate the Placemaking Plan ambition on these allocated sites. In taking a strategic role in enabling this, the Council can determine and better control the outcomes delivered by these uses alongside supporting the public transport improvements in a better fleet operation. Reinforcing the requirement to maintain employment land is a key consideration in establishing the business case to relocate other city centric uses to unlock development within the city centre.

## **Conclusions**

Discussions between First Bus and B&NES are ongoing and it is recognised that there is mutual benefit in ensuring that this strategy is realised. It is anticipated that the outcome of these discussions will mean that there is a realistic prospect that the bus depot will be relocated in a time period of around 5 years.

Positive progress is being made in discussions with those businesses that may relocate to Weston Island, and funding that has been secured through WECA to help to enable this outcome. The Local Plan Partial Update is considered to be effective in helping to facilitate this and to secure the regeneration of SB3 and SB6.

**Signed:** Doug Claringbold, Managing Director, First West of England, First Bus

**Date:** 24.05.2022

**Signed:** Richard Daone, Deputy Head of Planning (Policy), B&NES

**Date:** 24.05.2022